NCA
VOC FOR PGM/FN
BACKGROUNDER NO. 5-6238 NOVEMBER 2, 1978
BOB CHANCELLOR

UGANDA-TANZANIA WAR

ANNCR:

A BORDER WAR BETWEEN TWO EAST AFRICAN NEIGHBORS, UGANDA AND TANZANIA, IS LOOMING AFTER UGANDAN SEIZURE OF AN AREA KNOWN AS THE KAGERA SALIENT. VOA'S BOB CHANCELLOR IN NAIROBI HAS THIS BACKGROUND REPORT.

VOICE:

THE KAGERA SALIENT IS AN EIGHTEEN-HUNDRED SQUARE KILOMETER STRIP OF LAND ON THE WESTERN SIDE OF LAKE VICTORIA DROOPING SOUTHWARD INTO TANZANIA FROM THE COLONIALLY-ESTABLISHED BORDER ALONG THE FIRST PARALLEL. GEOGRAPHICALLY IT IS OF LITTLE SIGNIFICANCE -- A SPARSELY POPULATED MARSHY AREA GOOD FOR LITTLE BUT CATTLE GRAZING. BUT GEOPOLITICALLY UGANDAN PRESIDENT IDI AMIN SEES IT AS A KEY TO HIS SURVIVAL IN OFFICE AND TANZANIAN PRESIDENT JULIUS NYERERE APPARENTLY SEES IT AS A CAUSE FOR REMOVING PRESIDENT AMIN FROM THE AFRICAN SCENE.

THREE WEEKS AGO PRESIDENT AMIN CHARGED THAT TANZANIA HAD INVADED SOUTHERN UGANDA AND HE THREATENED TO PUT HIS ARMY INTO ACTION IF TANZANIA DID NOT WITHDRAW. THIS WEEK THE UGANDAN LEADER SAID HIS TROOPS HAD GONE INTO ACTION AGAINST TANZANIA AND HAD CAPTURED THE KAGERA SALIENT. THE KAGERA RIVER, UGANDA SAID, RATHER THAN THE FIRST PARALLEL SOUTH OF THE EQUATOR, IS NOW THE NEW BORDER OF UGANDA. BUT TANZANIAN PRESIDENT JULIUS NYERERE VOWED TO HIT BACK AT THE UGANDAN LEADER AND, PUTTING THE MATTER IN TERMS OF A MORAL CRUSADE, HE SAID "THIS MAN (AMIN) IS A BARBARIAN, HE HAS KILLED SO

MANY PEOPLE IN UGANDA WE MUST HIT BACK AT HIM UNTIL WE HAVE FINALLY GOTTEN RID OF THIS SNAKE IN OUR HOUSE."

PRESIDENT AMIN HAS CLAIMED THE EIGHTEEN-HUNDRED SQUARE KILOMETERS TO THE KAGERA RIVER SINCE A NINETEEN-SEVENTY-TWO BORDER WAR IN WHICH UGANDAN EXILES, APPARENTLY WITH TANZANIAN SUPPORT, TRIED TO RESTORE DEPOSED UGANDAN PRESIDENT MILTON OBOTE TO POWER IN KAMPALA. UGANDAN SOURCES SAY PRESIDENT AMIN LIVES IN FEAR OF ANOTHER ATTEMPT TO REESTABLISH THE OBOTE GOVERNMENT, AND HE BELIEVES THE KAGERA RIVER, WITH THE ONLY HIGHWAY BRIDGE BETWEEN THE TWO COUNTRIES, IS MUCH MORE EASILY DEFENDABLE THAN A STRAIGHT-LINE BOUNDARY. THE PEOPLE OF THE REGION DON'T REALLY MUCH CARE EITHER WAY. MEMBERS OF THE WAHAYA TRIBE THEY ARE LONG ACCUSTOMED TO LIVING ON BOTH SIDES OF THE BORDER AND IN THE TANZANIAN SOUTH PART OF THEIR AREA THEY ARE SUCCESSFUL BANANA, COFFEE AND SUGAR FARMERS.

THIS IS ONLY ONE OF HUNDREDS OF TRIBAL AREAS IN AFRICA THAT ARE DIVIDED BY ARTIFICIAL BOUNDARIES WHICH WERE IMPOSED BY THE COLONIAL CARVING UP OF THE CONTINENT. AND BECAUSE OF THE POTENTIAL FOR TROUBLE IN SUCH A SITUATION ONE OF THE BASIC ARTICLES OF THE ORGANIZATION OF AFRICAN UNITY HAS BEEN THAT COLONIAL BOUNDARIES WILL NOT BE CHANGED BY FORCE OR OTHER MEANS. IT IS POSSIBLE THAT PRESIDENT AMIN, FROM HIS VERY FIRST ACCUSATION OF TANZANIAN INVASION, HAD IN MIND THE ANNEXATION OF THE LAND TO THE KAGERA RIVER. BUT THE UNPREDICTABLE UGANDAN LEADER HAS OFTEN IN THE PAST FALSELY CRIED THAT HE WAS BEING INVADED FROM THE SOUTH.

MOST OBSERVERS BELIEVE THERE WAS NO TANZANIAN INVASION OF UGANDA. WHAT IS BELIEVED TO HAVE HAPPENED, ACCORDING TO INFORMED DIPLOMATS, IS THAT A PORTION OF PRESIDENT AMIN'S

ARMY STATIONED IN THE SOUTH MUTINIED, THAT LOYAL TROOPS WERE SENT SOUTH TO PUT DOWN THE MUTINY, AND THAT THE INVASION STORY WAS CONCOCTED AS A SMOKESCREEN. THEN, FEARING TANZANIA OR PRO-OBOTE EXILES MIGHT COME TO THE AID OF THE MUTINEERS, PRESIDENT AMIN MOVED TO CUT OFF THAT LINE OF SUPPLY OF ESCAPE. UGANDA HAS SHARPLY DENIED THE REPORTS OF A MUTINY. PRESSURE FROM OTHER AFRICAN STATES AND FROM THE O.A.U. IS LIKELY TO BE BROUGHT TO BEAR AGAINST UGANDA. BUT WITH UGANDA HOLDING LAND PRESIDENT AMIN BELIEVES IS ESSENTIAL TO HIS SURVIVAL, AND PRESIDENT NYERERE VOWING TO GET RID OF HIM, THE BATTLE BETWEEN TWO EQUALLY MATCHED COUNTRIES COULD GO ON FOR SOME TIME.

WJL/PY